

Seamless Summer Feeding Waiver in FY 2003  
Questions and Answers

PURPOSE: To provide questions and answers about the Seamless Summer Feeding Waiver in FY 2003

SCOPE: Participants in the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, and Summer Food Service Program for Children

DESCRIPTION: General

Q: What is the "seamless waiver?"

A: The seamless waiver combines features of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The purpose of this waiver is to make it easier for School Food Authorities (SFAs) to feed children in low-income areas during the summer months (or during the extended breaks of a year-round school schedule) under the NSLP. By replacing most of the SFSP rules, the waiver reduces paperwork and administrative burden that is normally associated with operating all three programs. Thus, FNS hopes that the waiver will encourage more SFAs to provide meals in the summer and other times when school is not in session.

Q: What organizations may participate in the seamless waiver?

A: Only SFAs may participate in the seamless waiver as sponsors. However, with State Agency approval, other organizations may operate waiver sites under SFA sponsorships.

Q: Are there any special provisions for the seamless waiver?

A: Yes. FNS has distributed a Seamless Waiver Prototype, revised for FY 2003, which contains the special provisions that the waiver must operate under. Any SFA interested in applying for the waiver should review this document or the State version of this waiver application format for detailed information about the waiver.

State Agency Approval of Waiver Applications

Q: What are the criteria for SFA participation in the waiver?

A: The State Agency should carefully consider waiver applications from SFAs. SFAs should include all the information contained in the FNS-prototype, as well as any other information that the State Agency has required the SFA to submit.

The SFA must be able to demonstrate administrative capability and financial viability to properly operate any child nutrition program. The State Agency should not approve applications from SFAs that are considered to have problems operating either the NSLP or the SFSP, or is determined to be seriously deficient in the administration of the SFSP or the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Previous participation in the SFSP is not a requirement for participating in the Seamless Waiver.

Q: Can a State Agency deny the waiver application if a school has had problematic CREs in the past or problematic SFSP reviews?

A: The State Agency should not approve the application of any SFA that has demonstrated problems operating the NSLP, SFSP, or any other child nutrition program.

Q: How should additions or deletions of sites be handled under the waiver?

A: The State Agency must approve any additional sites under the waiver. Any changes, including deletions, to the particular sites can be handled as an addendum to the initial approved waiver.

Q: Are State agencies required to provide training to SFAs approved to operate this waiver?

A: There is no mandatory training, but FNS encourages State agencies to provide training and technical assistance to SFAs based on their assessment of need for training.

### Eligible Sites

Q: Can an SFA sponsor a site that is located outside of its attendance area?

A: Yes, with State Agency approval.

Q: Can an SFA sponsor non-school sites operated by other organizations?

A: Yes.

Q: What sites are eligible for participation in the waiver?

A: Generally, the SFA should follow SFSP policy in selecting sites under the waiver. The following types of sites are allowed as waiver sites. Eligible sites are school or non-school facilities (buildings or outdoor locations) that are:

Open - located in eligible areas and open to all children through age 18 in the community, including sites in year-round schools;

Restricted open - located in eligible areas and initially open to all children through age 18 in the community but later restricted by the sponsor for security, safety, or control reasons, including sites in year-round schools;

Closed enrolled - located in eligible or non-eligible areas that are limited to a group of enrolled children through age 18, of which at least 50 percent must be eligible for free or reduced price school meals (academic summer schools are excluded); and

Migrant- primarily serving children through age 18 of migrant families, as certified by a migrant organization.

Camps - residential and non-residential camps that offer regularly scheduled food service as part of an organized program for enrolled children. Only meals served to children through age 18 who are eligible for free or reduced price school meals (based on income eligibility applications) may be reimbursed.

Q: Can sites qualify for area eligibility (i.e., as open or restricted open sites) based on data other than the nearest school's percent of free or reduced price enrollment eligibility for school meals?

A: Yes. The SFA may use census block group data. FNS must approve the use of data from other sources, such as departments of welfare and education and zoning commissions, prior to use. Generally, we prefer that the most current data be used whenever possible, which would be annual school data.

Q: Once approved to operate the waiver, must site eligibility be redetermined each year?

A: No. A new sponsor or a new site must use current data to establish eligibility for participation in the seamless waiver, as in the SFSP. Once in the waiver, as in the SFSP, a site may continue to qualify as an eligible open site using the same school data for two more years.

Q: Will the fact that schools under Provisions 2 or 3 do not have current eligibility data affect a school's eligibility to participate under the waiver?

A: No. We will accept data from a school site's base year to determine area eligibility. School sites must use the percent of eligible students, not the claiming percentages.

Q: Can an SFA limit its sponsorship just to school sites?

A: Yes. However, FNS encourages providing food service at as many sites in the community as possible. An SFA should match its sponsorship of sites with its financial and administrative capabilities. Where feasible, an SFA could enlarge its summer food service to children in the community by sponsoring non-school sites that are operated by other non-profit organizations.

Q: Can schools operating an academic summer school, whether private or public, participate in the waiver as closed enrolled sites?

A: No. If the school site provides meals only to enrolled summer school students, it is not eligible to participate in the waiver. Section 225.14(d)(2) of the SFSP Regulations, which is not waived for seamless summer feeding sites, requires that meal services at academic summer school sites must be open to children in the community.

Q: What are the criteria of approvable closed enrolled sites under the seamless summer feeding waiver?

A: An approvable closed enrolled site could include any program for children, other than an academic summer school, provided that at least 50 percent of the enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Examples of closed enrolled sites include recreation programs and enrichment classes or programs. The SFA could sponsor and operate these sites or sponsor sites that are operated by local government, school, or private non-profit staff.

Q: What are the requirements for site applications?

A: The SFSP site application requirements, as described in §225.6(c)(2) and (3) are waived. In order to approve seamless waiver requests, SFAs must submit the following information for each site:

- 1 Name and address
- 2 Indicate if the site operates on a year-round school calendar
- 3 Free and reduced price data to support site eligibility
- 4 Type of site (open, restricted open, closed enrolled, migrant, or camp)
- 5 Organization to operate the site, if other than the SFA
- 6 How meals will be advertised to the community
- 7 For closed enrolled sites: whether the sites are located in eligible areas, how it determined that at least 50 percent of the enrolled group of children in a non-eligible area qualify for free/reduced priced school meals, and why it is sponsoring enrolled sites.
- 8 For camps, whether the camp is residential or non-residential, whether it is located in an eligible area, a statement that only meals served to children who qualify for free/reduced price meals will be claimed for reimbursement, and why it is sponsoring camps.
9. Other information, as required by the State Agency.

Q: Can a year-round school with short off-track breaks (e.g., two weeks) participate in the waiver?

A: Yes, as long as the school is on a year-round/continuous schedule and two-week breaks are part of the school schedule.

### Meal Service

Q: What are the types and number of meals that may be served and reimbursed under the waiver?

A: The number and types of meals that may be served under the waiver are described in the SFSP regulations at §225.16(b). A maximum of two meals, such as lunch and breakfast, or lunch and a snack, may be served per day to children at all sites, except migrant sites and camps. At migrant sites and camps, a maximum of three meals may be served, such as breakfast, lunch, and a snack. Only migrant sites and camps may be reimbursed for lunch and supper served on the same day. For camps, both residential and non-residential, only the meals served to income eligible children (based on free/reduced price applications) will be reimbursed.

Q: What meal pattern/menu planning system is to be used for a supper under the Seamless Waiver, the NSLP lunch or the SFSP supper/lunch?

A: Any of the options available in the NSLP regulations.

Q: Will a-la-carte sales be allowed at the same time that the seamless waiver meals are being served?

A: Yes. The NSLP meal service rules are in effect. However, children should be encouraged to participate in the meal service being offered before they pay for a-la-carte items.

Q: Can meals be served on weekends?

A: Yes, with State Agency approval. An SFA that plans to serve weekend meals should include this information in its waiver application.

Q: Can a school participating under the waiver as an open site serve staggered meal times for community children and school children attending summer school?

A: Yes, but it must be the same meals service (i.e., the same meal, same length of serving time, same eating area, etc.).

Q: Must a school differentiate between meal counts for on-track (waiver) and off-track (NSLP) students in year-round sites?

A: Yes. Since all off-track students at waiver sites receive free meals, the school must be able to distinguish between them and the on-track students that may be paying reduced rates or paid rates for their meals.

Q: Are waiver sites required to get permission from the State Agency prior to a field trip?

A: Consistent with NSLP rules, they are not required to do so.

#### Local Level Monitoring

Q: When must waiver sites be reviewed by the SFA?

A: SFAs are required, as a condition of operating the waiver, to review within three (3) weeks of starting operation each site that is newly approved to operate the waiver or that is operated by non-SFA personnel. The SFA must review the site's meal counting, claiming, and meal pattern compliance. At the State Agency's option, waiver sites that were reviewed in FY 2001 and 2002 and did not have any serious problems do not have to be reviewed by the SFA for FY 2003.

Q: Do SFAs have to conduct edit checks, as required under §210.8 of the NSLP regulations, for waiver sites?

A: No. Edit checks will not be required for the waiver sites during the period of time that the SFA is operating the sites under the seamless waiver rules. However, SFAs should ensure that meal counts match participation and that claims reflect the number of meals served. During non-waiver periods, the SFA must conduct edit checks outlined in §210.8.

#### State Level Monitoring

Q: Are State agencies required to review waiver sites?

A: Yes. State agencies must review at least one waiver site at all SFAs that are scheduled for CRE review during School Year (SY) 2003 or 2004. This may involve a second visit to the SFA to evaluate the seamless waiver site in operation.

At the State Agency's convenience, the review of waiver sites may be conducted as follows:

<u>CRE review</u>	<u>Waiver site review</u>
SY 2002/2003	summer of 2003
SY 2003/2004	summer of 2003 or 2004

State agencies are not required to conduct annual reviews of SFAs operating under the seamless waiver or any special reviews for SFAs outside the normal CRE review schedule. However, State agencies are encouraged to review waiver sites even if a CRE is not scheduled for that SFA, especially if concerns arise about management of the waiver operations. SMI reviews are not required for waiver sites.

Q: Can a CRE be scheduled during the summer to avoid making the second visit to the seamless waiver site?

A: Only if the school is operating the NSLP on a year-round basis.

Q: How should States review seamless waiver sites when conducted during a CRE?

A: States should determine the best method to evaluate the certification (in closed enrolled sites), meal count, and meal service procedures of the waiver site. Although it is not required, the State Agency may choose to validate a claim of the seamless waiver site.

### Program Access

Q: What can be done to ensure that SFAs operating an academic summer school make a concerted effort to attract children from the community who are not attending summer school?

A: Both in the approval process and in the review of sites, State agencies should ensure that schools approved as seamless sites make a reasonable effort to advertise the availability of free meals to children in the community who will not be attending summer school. As part of the waiver application process, SFAs must describe how each site will advertise the availability of meal services to children in the community. The SFA should provide enough detail in its waiver application so the method of advertising meal services to the public can be documented and confirmed later during a review by the State Agency or FNS. For example, if the SFA stated that waiver site meals would be advertised in a publication, a copy of the advertisement should be available. Other examples would include documentation of public service announcements by radio or television stations, and copies of flyers provided to students or mailed to students' parents. If the school site is selected for review as part of a scheduled CRE, State Agency reviewers should include the openness of the site as a review element.

Q: If a school does not want to open its cafeteria to children in the community, can it serve its summer school children in the cafeteria and the other children outside somewhere, for example, in a park across the street or on the school playground?

A: Regardless of the location of the site, whether in the cafeteria of the school or in the park across the street, the same facilities must be used to feed both groups of children. If the school does not want to open its meal service to children in the community who are not attending summer school, it is not eligible to participate in the waiver.

Q: Are State agencies/SFAs required to track meal service for hours, days, and weeks of operation?

A: It is the State Agency's option to require this information on the waiver application, and it would be the State's option, as well, to require the SFA to monitor the waiver sites for compliance with the waiver procedures approved by the State.

### Rates

Q: Will qualifying schools continue to receive the severe need breakfast rates under waiver operations?

A: Yes.

Q: Will schools participating as waiver sites continue to receive the commodity rates under NSLP?

A: Yes. Schools will receive the full commodity allotment for both lunches and suppers.

Q: Will schools participating in the waiver still receive the extra \$.02 differential?

A: Yes. However, for schools that did not already earn the extra \$.02 differential prior to coming onto the seamless waiver, the meals served under the seamless waiver cannot be used to help a school qualify for the extra funding.

Q: What rates will non-school sites receive?

A: In most cases, the SFA will receive the same reimbursement rates for non-school sites as for the school sites. When different schools within the SFA's jurisdiction qualify for different rates, such as the severe need breakfast rate or the extra \$.02 differential rate, then the non-school site will earn the same reimbursement rates as the nearest school. If the SFA is sponsoring a school that is outside its jurisdiction, the SFA will receive the same NSLP reimbursement rates that the school site earns during the regular school year.

Q: Since there is no supper rate in the NSLP, what will be the reimbursement rate for suppers under the waiver?

A: The NSLP lunch rate, including commodity support rate and, if the school is qualified, the \$.02 severe need differential.

Q: When may SFAs begin claiming seamless waiver rates (i.e., the free rates for all meals)?

A: Once the regular school year is over or, in the case of year-round schools, during the breaks throughout the year for off-track students.

### Reporting

Q: Since the new NSLP and SBP rates for the upcoming SY are effective for July, how would the claims for June and July be handled?



A: State agencies should refer to the NSLP regulations, at 7 CFR 210.8(c)(1), for combining claims of months with Seamless Waiver activity. Since the NSLP rates change on July 1, the June and July claims cannot be combined. June meals served under the waiver would be included in the same claim as regular NSLP meals for June. If the SFA did not operate the regular NSLP in June but operated the waiver for 10 days or less, it could combine the June waiver meals on the May claim. Conversely, if it operates the waiver for 10 days or less during July, it could combine the July and August claims.

Q: Can a Food Service Management Company (FSMC) be responsible for administrative tasks such as monitoring/claims/reporting for SFAs participating in the seamless waiver?

A: Yes. The regulatory provision that prohibits this in the SFSP (§226.15(a)(3)) is waived for the seamless waiver. As such, FSMC personnel would follow the applicable NSLP regulations at §210.16.

### SFSP Issues

Q: What provisions of the SFSP apply to SFAs participating in the waiver?

A: The following provisions are not waived and require that SFAs must:

- 1 Agree to serve meals at no cost (§225.6(e)(4))
- 2 Agree to claim reimbursement only for the types of meals (breakfast, lunch, snack, or supper) agreed upon with the State Agency, which are served at approved sites during approved meal service periods (§225.6(e)(7))
- 3 Demonstrate financial and administrative capability to operate the program and accept final financial and administrative responsibility for the total program operations at all sites (§225.14(c)(1))
- 4 Not be seriously deficient in operating the SFSP (§225.14(c)(2))
- 5 Conduct a regularly scheduled food service for children from areas in which poor economic conditions exist (§225.14(c)(3))
- 6 For schools, operate sites that are open to children in the community (§225.14(d)(2))
- 7 For all sites except migrant sites or camps, serve up to two meals (combination may not include lunch and supper), or one meal and one snack, or two snacks per day (introductory paragraph (b) of §225.16).

8 Serve up to three reimbursable meals per day to children attending residential or non-residential camps, which are eligible for free or reduced price school meals, based on income eligibility applications. (§225.16(b)(1)).

9 Migrant sites may serve up to three meals or two meals and a snack per day (§225.16(b)(4)).

Q: How does the seamless waiver affect the SFSP review schedule?

A: As long as an SFA is participating in the seamless summer feeding waiver, it is not considered to be a sponsor under the SFSP. Therefore, the SFA should be taken out of the pool of SFSP sponsors to be reviewed by the SFSP State Agency. This would include removing the SFA from the list of sponsors whose prior year reimbursements equal half of all reimbursements, as required in §225.7(d)(2)(ii)(B) of the SFSP regulations.

Q: Are schools participating in the waiver required to attend the annual SFSP training?

A: No. SFSP training requirements are waived; SFAs and schools participating in the seamless summer feeding waiver are not considered to be participating as sponsors of the SFSP.

SOURCE:

USDA, School and Community Nutrition Programs, Policy #03-10  
USDA, Summer Food Service Program for Children, Policy #03-05